

CHAPTER 194

November 7, 2011

"This must be it..."

The entirety of the Investigation Team, minus Maya who was currently at home recovering from her encounter with her shadow, stood outside two large golden gates high in the sky, the door to Nanako and her kidnapper the final defense between them and the end of their mission. Justin, strangely enough, tagged along despite how vocally against going into the television again he was before. Perhaps it was just because kidnapping Nanako of all people had crossed the line big time for him. Perhaps it was because the others had filled him up to date on what had gone down, and... well... Justin recognized the description they gave him for the killer. He was always suspicious of the guy, after all he WAS dragging Nanako around at gun point like a human shield. Now he just had confirmation this was their killer; and if the killer was in fact here, which he was according to Rise, then it seemed this was the end. They had him cornered; and with his conviction this would all be over. Justin could suck it up just a little longer if it meant an end to all of this.

"Christ, I hope we didn't wait too long..." Justin mumbled to himself, rubbing his forehead a bit. She was just a little girl, and she was trapped her with a psychopath. The rules generally were that the person in question was safe until it got foggy on their side, but... that wasn't taking into account the murderer being in there with her. They had more or less established that throwing someone in the television to let the shadow do the work was the method the killer was taking to off his victims... would he dare do the deed himself? Justin rubbed his head with self-annoyance. "This is my fault. I shouldn't have charged in by myself." Justin sighed after a moment. It was the heat of the moment and he panicked, he should have realized trying to take on an entire dungeon of shadows by himself was never going to work out. He supposed at the least Maya had gotten her persona out of it, which was cool if kind of useless now that everything was coming to a close. Not to mention it just brought up all sorts of other questions. He stood there shaking his head for a moment, though he eventually was interrupted from his self-pity by the pressure of someone's hand along the length of his shoulder blade.

"It's alright; you did the right thing and I'm proud of you." Yu smiled at Justin as he spun about to stare at the source of the human contact. Well he was certainly the last person Justin expected to be reassuring him he hadn't fucked up by delaying the search for Nanako. Which was strange, because it was clear he was really down about all of this. From what Justin had heard from Chie, who had heard from Yukiko, he wasn't even talking when they weren't in the television. Just kind of stared at the walls with this disappointed expression. She had tried going over to his house to comfort him, but it just wasn't doing much good. Which meant they quicker they got

this thing done, the better it was going to be for everyone involved. Justin took a deep breath before turning his attention to the gates. He tried to open it, but it seemed locked tight by a chain. Even Justin couldn't lockpick what didn't have a lock; but he could melt metal down into molten ashes. He quickly summoned his persona to melt the chains off the door and to grant the Investigation Team access.

From there, Yu quickly kicked the door open, what with being the most eager to get in through the gate after all and to rescue Nanako. It only took him a split second to spot Namatame and Nanako; and from the looks of it, he was very confused by the sudden dead end, the road ending in a staircase and a pedestal. There was nowhere left to run, and he knew it. "Nanako!" Yu shouted before darting forward in an attempt at getting her away from the killer. The good news was she was still alright; the bad news was Namatame immediately went back to his tactic of keeping a tight grip around the child's throat. She was his only defense from being captured... Perhaps he didn't quite realize that child's life was the only thing keeping the Investigation Team from hurling him off the ends of the clouds. "Namatame, you bastard! Let her go!"

"You... know me?" Namatame remarked with great curiosity as the teenagers stared him down. Justin wasn't sure what he was expecting; the guy was a senator before he was a delivery man, so people around her knew what he looked and sounded like. Hell, even Chie recognized him when he was a delivery man, though in recent days she was having trouble trying to recall what his name was. It was strange, you'd think she'd remember an ex-politician, especially one who was relevant to the murder case they were investigating. Besides, Justin had recognized him when he saw the fucker two days ago; no doubt the knowledge of his identity would be passed onto the others.

"So you're the killer..." Yosuke growled furiously, stepping up towards the side of Yu. They were both equally angry though for entirely different reasons. Yu because his loved ones were at risk, Yosuke because his loved ones had already been taken from him. One to stop the worst from happening, one to get vengeance for the sins that already had been committed. It didn't matter their motivations, they were both there to stop Namatame, right here, right now. Namatame was very confused as he stared at the Investigation Team; though that eventually subsided to a mischievous grin, a wicked laughter under his breath.

"You're the ones I saved... Don't worry... I'll save this girl too..." Namatame mumbled to himself, low and almost emotionless like one would expect from a man with no heart. Justin was quick to draw his gun and point it straight at Namatame. After all, his definition of saving was in much need of improvement from what he could tell. Alas, it seemed the moment Justin pointed his magnum at the culprit, his grip on Nanako tightened, cutting off her airwaves and making it harder for her to breathe. "D-Don't come near me." Namatame stuttered angrily. As if he could do anything funny faster than a bullet could travel.

"Calm down, Justin-san! We can't predict his behavior!" Naoto tried to calm Justin. While having a gun trained on the guy sounded great in theory, Justin couldn't guarantee a shot when Nanako was in the way; and if something came up where he needed to fire that gun, and he missed; that was it. Nanako was a goner. Besides, they weren't going to kill anyone unless it was absolutely necessary. They needed to bring Namatame back to serve his sentence, not to mention that Mitsuo's sentence wouldn't be shortened if they couldn't prove he was a copy cat killer. Yeah he was a murderer, but most of the Investigation Team was aware he hadn't been in the best mental health... he deserved some help, and from there, maybe he deserved another chance at life.

"Why are you doing this?" Yu snarled through his teeth. He wanted answers for all of this; not just Nanako, but all of his friends and the announcer and Saki. Why did they have to die? What justification could he possibly have for any of this? Namatame stared blankly at the children for a moment, eyes vacant like one would expect from a mad man.

"They all... want to be saved..." Namatame eventually spoke up, voice as monotone as ever. Justin rolled his eyes before readjusting his aim on the culprit once again. It was slowly but surely becoming apparent to him that Namatame was out of his mind; he thought killing people was saving them, he was making decisions for other people, he was staring vacantly into space like a mad man. He was insane; and Justin couldn't trust the guy without a gun pointed at his head.

"...Did I ever ask you to save me?" Rise remarked with annoyance after a moment. She was understandably very angry. What the hell did save even mean here? What, did he believe in salvation through death or something? Well newsflash, that wasn't saving anyone first of all, second of all that wasn't his decision to make. He didn't get the right to determine who lives or dies, no matter how 'noble' he thought his intentions were.

"And you didn't save us, dammit! It was the exact opposite!" Kanji pointed out. It was very debatable by this point whether or not Namatame was in his right mind, or if he could tell what he was doing was actually deadly, so perhaps pointing out just what Namatame had done wasn't a horrible idea. But no, either he was completely delusional or he was well aware of what he was doing. And neither was exactly a good thing to be when you were holding a little girl hostage.

"If I hadn't put you in the TV... how would you have ended up...?" Namatame questioned, as if trying to justify his actions. Everyone was flabbergasted, though not exactly for the right reasons. Hell, Yukiko looked like she had never been so confused and yet so angry at the same time. You know how they would end up if he didn't put them in. That's exactly right; ALIVE. Sure they were alive now, but it was a really close call most of the time.

"Are you trying to say... we wouldn't have been able to face ourselves?" Rise questioned. She was probably looking a little too deep into it. Namatame was out of his mind, and while one would like to think he at the very least was trying to do good despite his methods being horrible, his mind was too far gone for anyone to truly assume his intentions were pure.

"What...!? But we nearly died!" Yukiko spat out, completely livid. It was a general rule of thumb that if you made either Yu or Yukiko angry, you fucked up big time; and this was no exception. To see Yukiko so furious... he might as well have signed his own death warrant. One strike was all she'd need. Namatame took a deep breath before turning his blank gaze over to Yukiko.

"Yes... Exactly..."

"Okay. Fuck it." Justin span around the chamber of his gun aiming it straight at Namatame's head. He knew they were supposed to try and take the guy in, but Justin saw no reason why this shitbag should live when so many innocent people had died. Naoto had to actually slap him before he fired a round off at Namatame. Shooting him wasn't going to help, especially if they could still talk him down. Justin rubbed his cheek with annoyance before steadying his aim on Namatame again, just to keep him from doing something stupid.

"You keep saying save this and save that... Are you saying murdering people is your idea of saving them!?" Yosuke shouted, just about having enough of this. He wouldn't accept Saki dying for nothing; because this asshole thought he was some sort of savior by slitting their throat's in the dark. Namatame didn't even seem to flinch though, only mildly annoyed by his questions.

"Murder...? No, I'm saving them..."

"How's that different, huh!? All you're doing is killing people!" Yosuke lectured Namtame, having just about enough. He was putting his foot down; he had enough of Namatame and his goddamn game. Of course, he had about enough of it the moment he murdered someone, but hearing his motivation for killing innocent people only went to piss him off even more. He was almost tempted to take Justin's gun and to shoot the fucker himself. It wasn't made much better from the smug grin that slowly swept across his face, as if getting satisfaction out of all of this.

"Haha... If you want to think that, go ahead... I know... you chased us all the way here... to kill... Ha...haha... Well, to bad... I'm... gonna save her..." Namatame remarked with determination, as if he had set out to do nothing but save this girl. After that he really did not care. Justin couldn't help but spit with disgust. Did they come here to kill him? Well I don't think anyone came here with the intention to kill, other than Namatame of course, but after just listening to this guy speak... Some of the Investigation Team members were sincerely considering it. Justin, Yosuke, and

surprisingly enough Yu. Not because he was an asshole mind you; but because no one harmed Nanako.

"You asshole... You're not gonna get away with this!" Kanji muttered with irritation. Namatame glared at the boy for a moment, taking a deep breath and clenching his fists together tightly. He had just about enough of all the insults and questions. He was saving all of them and then they had the audacity to turn about and try to kill him and this little girl? He wouldn't let them, he wouldn't...

"Shut the hell up!" He finally shouted losing his cool. Within a split second of his temper bursting out like a volcano, his eye split like watermelons, the iris's mixing around until they formed a golden like tone. His form slowly wavered, with purple smog floating about him in an evil aura, a wicked grin still warping his face. The Investigation Team had slowly been trying to close the distance between him and them without alerting him, but even then they couldn't help but freeze in terror as his form warped to that of a shadow's. It was difficult to say whether he was always the shadow or whether his shadow had taken over; just like Justin's tended to do.

"What a wonderful world... An unknown, unreachable place... filled with pleasant fog... I'm a Savior... It's filthy over there... So many evildoers... That's why I'm going to save them... I'm a Savior... A righteous hero..."

"Is that... a Shadow?" Yukiko questioned. It was what everyone had been wondering. Was it a shadow and if so how long had it been a shadow before they noticed. Was it just inhabiting Namatame's mind like Justin's shadow did? Tempting him to do awful things? Justin could kind of understand what it was like to be pressured by your shadow to do something you know was wrong; to be deceived into sin... But even then, it seemed like Namatame was sane enough to know what he was doing, but insane enough to not realize what he was doing was fatal. I think he truly believed he was saving people... And that disgusted Justin on so many levels; though I think the fact that he continued to choke a child disgusted him more. He could still hear Nanako choking and wheezing as the shadow kept a tight grip on her throat.

"...Let's do this." Yosuke signaled off to both Kanji and Justin. He didn't need to explain everything, they were both very clearly aware of the situation at hand with Namatame practically strangling Nanako right now. Justin pulled out his magnum and pointed it just to the right of Namatame before pulling the trigger, causing the shadow to instinctively dodge out of the way to the side... just long enough to distract him while Kanji and Yosuke charged forward and punched him out, releasing his grip on Nanako. "Now, yu!" Yosuke shouted back towards Narukami as they formed a protective barrier to keep him away from Nanako. Nanako was very weak from being in this world for so long, coupled with being choked out by her assailant. She walked very timidly down the steps to try and reach Yu, though she stumbled after only a few stairs. Thank god Yu was able to catch her in time. He was clearly pissed off too as Nanako fell unconscious into his arms.

“Give her back! I’m going to save her!” Namatame shouted, trying to break through the barricade of Kanji and Yosuke to reach his prey. Yu took a couple deep breaths as Nanako lay in his arms, unconscious and from the looks of it, not exactly well. He tried to calm himself, but it just wasn’t working. He turned his glare up from Nanako to Namatame, body trembling with rage as he laid eyes on the one who had hurt his cousin. He struggled for a while to try and get past Kanji and Yosuke, but it just wasn’t working... It didn’t take long before Namatame gripped at his head, his skull pounding like bangos, fingers digging into his skin as legs began to wobble. At first it looked like he was going insane, but then the dark mist that surrounded him seemed to intensify. And then... well what happened next no one had seen coming.

As the aura glowed brighter and brighter, Rise could feel thousands of shadows closing in on them at once. They weren’t full blown shadows mind you, rather, what felt like the remains of the smaller ones. But that was all it took. Within a split second, a black shadow ripped through his stomach like a knife through butter. And then another. And another and another. Namatame was acting like a tornado, sucking in every shadow around him in an attempt at boosting his power as his flailing body was lifted into the air, shape disfigured by the shadows squirming in his body. It was bad enough without Kurt nearly getting sucked in himself. His traction on the ground was the only thing keeping him from going flying towards Namatame, and even then, Chie and Yukiko had to help him keep his feet planted on the ground, small strands of shadow like fabric ripping off of him and making its way to Namatame. His figure and health was fine, and it didn’t seem to help Namatame in the long run, but it did show just what kind of danger Kurt had been in without Chie and Yukiko’s support keeping him from flying into the tornado of souls. The mist didn’t clear for a while, but when it did, it parted like the red seas for the shadows new form. It was like a bobble head, its skull far too big for it’s white cloaked body, a red halo in the shape of a peace sign above his skull. He truly believed he was some kind of messiah. How disgusting.

“Rise... Take care of Nanako.” Yu called out to her. She didn’t fight anyway, and someone needed to keep Nanako safe while the rest of the Investigation Team did their thing. Rise nodded a bit, quickly making her way over to Yu before taking her off his hands for the moment being. The Investigation Team all gathered into their fighting positions, ready to charge into battle, the gusts of wind circulating from Namatame’s spinning Halo causing their clothes to flutter into the breeze. “This is for Yamano, and Saki, and Maroka, you bastard!” Yu shouted before charging forward, everyone charging in just behind him.

“Agidyne.” The shadow barked before extending his slender, bony hand in the shape of a peace sign. Within a brief moment, a burst of fire fell from the heavens in a controlled burst, all converging on one point: Teddie. Teddie was pretty resilient though, and while his head WAS on fire, he could just smutter the flames while rolling around. Not so much anyone else. **“Agidyne.”** He cast a second time, this

time, aimed at Chie. A direct hit, as she was blown pretty far back, the fabric of her jacket burnt ever so slightly. Her parents were going to kill her if this shadow didn't.

"Chie!" Justin came to a halt, turning back around. He was going to run back to her, but Yu ended up grabbing him by the wrist and forcing him to continue charging forward. She'd be fine; but Yu could tell that the spell flinging wasn't going to end at just fire; which meant if they stopped moving for even a second, they were all screwed. They had to keep moving and strike him down before he could finish them off with their respective weaknesses.

"Bufudyne, Ziodyne, Bufudyne, Agidyne, Garudyne, Ziodyne." Narutame continued casting spells; one by one flinging the Investigation Team back. Yosuke, Yukiko, Kurt, Kanji; all of them were sent flying across the room and into the gates at the beginning of the room. Naoto, strangely, didn't have any particular elemental weaknesses; but she couldn't exactly resist much of a blow as it was. One strike of fire and she was knocked out cold. Kurt was pretty concerned as she dropped like a fly in front of him, but then he got hit with a nice healthy dose of Garu and got sent hurling back to the entrance much like the others. No one even knew if Kurt had any elemental weaknesses though, so I suppose this was a learning experience for them all. Justin almost got hit by a blast of Bufu, though thankfully he was able to just narrowly dodge it. Chie was just starting to get back off the ground, groaning a bit from the blast of flames she was hit with earlier. **"Control."**

By this point Yu and Justin were the only ones still darting forward in an attempt at killing the bastard, but that very quickly stopped as Justin stopped in his place, clutching his head tightly. Yu couldn't help but stop for a moment, ready to pull Justin's arm again to keep him moving, when suddenly he pulled his gun out and aimed it at Yu. Yu thankfully enough, hit the pavement just as he fired, the bullet just barely soaring over his stomach and skimming Namatame as it flew across its trajectory.

"What the hell are you doing!?" Yu shouted at Justin. Why was he firing at Yu!? They were fighting Namatame right now, not each other, dammit! Justin groaned a bit, holding his head again as he tried to fight the mind control Namatame had place on him. Perhaps it was for that reason he recast the control spell, feeling his control over Justin wavering. Within a split second Justin pulled his gun back on Yu, firing a couple shots off at his feet as he crawled backwards trying to scurry away, doing his best to get up and run before getting shot. Thankfully Chie had managed to catch up with the others and kick the gun out of Justin's hand, knocking it into the clouds below. Justin was needless to say pissed; but once he came to in a couple minutes or so, I'm sure he'd be very grateful. And that left Yu, still darting towards Namatame. The shadow pushed his arms together in an attempt at blocking Yu, but alas, you don't block getting stabbed. Yu jumped up before thrusting his blade deep into the shadow's chest, causing purple blood to spew out from his stomach like a fountain. Yu didn't even bother to pull the sword out; he just let go of his grip on the

handle and fell to the ground, content watching the damage he had done. He smiled a bit as the shadow squirmed in pain, trying to push the blade out of it's chest before collapsing to the ground, it's form returning back to his more humanoid shape. Thank fully, due to Namatame being much smaller than his shadow, the sword came loose once he reverted to his true form. No deaths on this mission it seemed.

"D-Dammit... why?" Namatame groaned from his place on the ground, gripping his chest with pain as the Investigation Team slowly gathered around him, their movement slow from the pain of nearly being blown to pieces by Namatame's shadow Justin spat on him as he squirmed on the ground, as if to get the last blow on him before they hauled him off to prison. Justin was a little curious where the purple smoke was that usually accompanied killing a shadow; but he supposed since Namatame didn't accept anything, the shadow must still be alive somewhere; licking its wounds for a comeback. Just like with Mitsuo.

"Because, Namatame: the good guys always win. And you were never the good guy."

"Nana-chan's still small... so her other self didn't appear like everyone else... And she got caught in all that craziness... I hope she'll be okay..."

The Investigation Team had all been gathered at the hospital, where Nanako had been hauled off to after they all returned to the human side. Namatame had already been hauled off himself, though Justin could have swore he overheard the police officers that put him into custody mention some paramedics. Seemed he'd be getting some medical treatment from some shitty hospital in the outskirts of wherever before he got put behind bars where he belonged. All the same, everyone was worried as they waited to hear some news about Nanako's condition; after all, she still hadn't waken up from falling unconscious in the other world; concerning to say the least.

"I mean, are the doctors going to be able to help her...?" Yosuke expressed his concerns, leaning against a wall with his arms crossed. Everyone was taking it hard of course; though I don't think anyone had anything on Yu. Yu wouldn't even talk as much as everyone tried to coax him into it. He just stared at that door blankly, not moving an inch from his seat; as if he wouldn't be content to move until he knew Nanako was alright. It was going to be a while for that.

"A deliveryman named Namatame... The possibility of Nanako-chan being targeted... If only I'd been more thorough in putting the facts together...! Then Nanako-chan wouldn't have had to go through this..." Naoto remarked with self-pity, disappointed for not seeing this earlier. They all should have really; and while Justin did agree with Naoto, he was somewhat pissed. Oh, she regretted Nanako

being targeted, but she didn't give a crap about muting Maya. And no, saying you offer your condolences does not count. You muted a person for life, you can't just say you're sorry and move on with your life like nothing happened and everything was a-okay now.

"That... goes for me too. If I hadn't stood there like a lump in front of that bastard, Nanako-chan might've been okay..." Yosuke sighed, shaking his head a bit. To be fair, Yosuke was a lot more useful in rescuing Nanako than a certain detective was. They actually had to stop for a moment to wake Naoto up on their way out, because somebody couldn't take a punch. Or a molten ball of lava.

"I hate myself... Why do I always panic when it matters most...?" Chie sniffed a bit, trying to hold back tears. She had nearly broke down crying several times now, as would be understandable when someone close to you, especially a little girl, was very very hurt. But alas, crying helped no one, and while it might make her feel better, it would make Justin feel worse. He was quick to take a seat next to her, wrapping his arm around her opposite shoulder in a reassuring manner, giving her a shoulder to cry on should she need it.

"Hey, hey; don't hate yourself. You did great out there." Justin smiled at her rubbing her shoulder slightly. Usually Chie got embarrassed over this stuff, but I think she just needed some reassurance that they did everything they could, and everything they could was enough by this point. She didn't care through what means. She just continued to try and hold back tears in Justin's embrace. "I'm positive she's going to be alright. Nanako's strong like that; and look on the bright side. We got the killer; once Nanako recovers this will all be over. We just have to have faith she'll pull through and everything can go back to normal." Justin spoke to everyone, though his eyes were on Chie the entire time. She nodded a bit, wiping her eyes one last time with the side of her index finger. Justin was right; tears wouldn't help at a time like this. Nanako needed to know they were there for her, and they all expected her to pull through. She would pull-through.

" Sorry... You're absolutely right." Naoto sighed. She was a bit embarrassed to think she let herself nearly breakdown like that. It was important that they kept cool heads about all of this. And besides, Justin was right: they had their real killer this time. All this shit with Personas was over now. Although Justin was sure Maya would be a little disappointed that she wasn't going to use her Persona ability, he was sure she'd be happy this was all over. Though, thinking of Maya; she didn't look to great either. Like, not great by accepting your shadow kind of standards too. He had to wonder why. Maybe it was just a long-time coming kind of thing; handing onto that stress for two years before she could accept herself. Who knows; it would resolve itself in time, just like everything else.

"This is all that bastard Namatame's fault, and he's behind bars now, right? And it ain't like we were too late for Nanako-chan." Kanji added on. He was probably the

only one here not on the verge of tears; he truly believed Nanako would make it through. Justin couldn't help but be grateful that there was someone else here with such a positive attitude on the topic. It made it a lot easier to calm the rest of the team down.

"I'll come see Nana-chan every day so she'll get better faster!" Teddie remarked with great dedication as he stood up from his seat, making a promise to Nanako much like the one he had earlier to play with her in the days to come. Which I imagine must be hell for Yu since Teddie was a borderline pedophilic.

"That's all we can do right now... Gee, Kanji... You sounded cool for a second there." Rise went back to her ever teasing nature, mocking Kanji once again. He was one of the most level-minded people here at the moment, and yet Rise still somehow managed to turn that against him. Kanji went to open his mouth and rebute that statement, but he eventually decided it just wasn't worth it, sighing and shaking his head instead.

"Huh? You guys still here?" The Investigation Team was interrupted by the sudden appearance of Adachi. He had been here in regards to Dojima's injuries in the car crash, but once Nanako was transferred her, his focuses soon changed. Justin smiled a bit before passing Adachi a mock salute, pressing his middle and index finger to his forehead and shooting it off to greet him. Adachi just smiled back; he didn't really do any of that weird greeting shit. Partially because he was too lazy. Still, Justin was always happy to see Adachi, and as much as he hated to admit it, the other way around. It was rare to run into a kid Justin's age that really got it; you know? Just what it was like to be in his position.

"Adachi-san, um... did they find out anything...?"

"Dojima-san's speaking with the doctor now, but they can't say anything definite until they run some tests on her... Not just Nanako-chan, but the perp, too... Who knows when we'll be able to hear his story...? Well, it's getting late, so hurry home. The last thing we need is for you guys to collapse too." Adachi reassured them before marching off. It was a little concerning about Nanako, but then, that's just because they didn't do any tests. Justin was sure everything would come back fine once they DID do said tests.

"He's right, we should call it a night."

"And for once we can actually go to sleep before midnight."